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The Director of Central Intelligence

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Washington, D.C. 20505

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11 MAY 1977

The Honorable Adlai E. Stevenson
Chairman
Subcommittee on Collection, Production and Quality
Select Committee on Intelligence
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20310

Dear Senator Stevenson:

I want to thank you for the opportunity to review the Subcommittee draft report on "The National Intelligence Estimates--B Team Episode Concerning Soviet Strategic Capabilities and Objectives."

As you know, the President has directed that a thorough study be made of the Intelligence Community to identify areas where organizational or procedural changes are needed to ensure that intelligence provides national policymakers with the best possible support. This study is nearing completion, and one of the principal areas of my concern is to ensure that we find the most effective means to produce useful and relevant national intelligence, particularly National Intelligence Estimates. I wish to assure you and the Subcommittee that I will give full consideration to your findings and recommendations in this and other reports in pursuing this task.

I agree with some of what I believe to be the most important findings and recommendations of the Report. I share your view that we could improve the method of reviewing estimates. I am considering various ways to do this, including forming a board or panel of outside experts. While I expect such innovations to improve the quality of our National Intelligence Estimates, I do not regard them as a panacea for resolving all the substantive issues discussed in the Subcommittee report. Many of these issues arise from the limitations in our evidence, uncertainties which accompany long-term projections and legitimate differences of interpretation by experts both within and outside of government.

I also agree on the importance of evaluating developments in Soviet military forces in the context of overall Soviet objectives, foreign and domestic policies, and economic developments. Before deciding on a solution to this problem, however, I want to assess the results of a survey of requirements of key consumers of NIEs on the USSR. I doubt that an expansion of NIE 11-3/8 will be the best solution. I expect a continuing requirement for estimates, such as NIE 11-3/8, covering critical categories of Soviet

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military forces in considerable detail. These need to be complemented by estimates such as NIE 11-4 which cast military developments in the broader context recommended in the Subcommittee report.

I believe the description in the report of last year's experiment in competitive analysis proposed by the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board will be a useful record of the episode. The substantive evaluation of the B Team's findings on Soviet strategic objectives is very perceptive and helpful.

The Subcommittee's proposal for national level net assessments of the military balance corresponds with my own views on the subject and with recommendations made by my predecessor. However, it is necessary to distinguish among kinds of US-USSR net assessments and to clarify which are appropriate as part of the intelligence analytical and estimating process. I stated my views on the role of intelligence in net assessments in response to additional questions submitted to me by the Select Committee on Intelligence at the time of my confirmation hearings. I believe that intelligence agencies should conduct comprehensive net assessments on two or more foreign nations, as well as Soviet-US net assessments to estimate the capability of individual Soviet weapon systems, to determine Soviet technical requirements, and to identify trends and estimate the implications of Soviet programs.

In three areas I believe the report could be improved. First, in its criticisms of NIE 11-3/8, the report does not make clear that the scope, purpose and format of this estimate were devised to meet the requirements of key policymaking consumers for an NIE limited to those Soviet strategic forces constituting the most serious threat to US security. Second, the report does not recognize that this NIE series does not stand entirely alone as a means of communicating to the national leadership about Soviet strategy and capabilities, but is part of a stream of national intelligence on the Soviet Union to which the leadership is exposed. Third, the conclusion that the NIE 11-3/8 series of the past few years have inadequately served the President and key US leaders and have done them a disservice, does not seem to be supported in the investigative record in the report other than in the assertions of the PFIAB.

I asked those responsible for the preparation of recent estimates in the NIE 11-3/8 series to review the Subcommittee report for accuracy and for the purpose of offering such other comments on it as they deemed appropriate. The results of these reviews are forwarded in the two attachments.

Yours sincerely,

Js/ Stansfield Turner

STANSFIELD TURNER

Attachments

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Letter to Senator Stevenson from DCI re Draft Report of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, "The National Intelligence Estimates - B Team Episode..."

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